A TRAIN RECORDING ONLY A COLLECTOR COULD LOVE

It was an unlucky day March 14, 1970 when we taped the sounds of the California Zephyr leaving Oakland. It was the day after Friday the 13th, a week later the last Zephyr would leave 3rd Street, and we ended up with 13 minutes of tape marred by tape hiss and some "dropouts"--not up to our standards. But we cherish the recording and believe others as crazy as us would also delight in hearing 8 minutes of idling diesel engines, preceded by 3 minutes of the slowly approaching CZ horn while the P.A. goes through the familiar announcement of train 18, followed by a sad 2 minutes as the Zephyr rumbles away along 3rd Street, its horn seemingly fading into oblivion. All this is punctuated by crowd noises and auto horns--in short, a bit chaotic and entirely realistic, presented with no editing.

We can offer you this recording only in monaural standard C-30 tape cassette, one side recorded, one 15-minute side blank for your own use. Plays on any standard 1 7/8 ips cassette player (for best sound, feed the player output into a good high fidelity set). The cost is $1.30 (Californians add 7¢ sales tax). Send your order to Message Media, Box 9007, Berkeley, Calif. 94709, specifying tape T-1. Are you crazy too?

Next issue: (Feb. 15) 1970 Chronology of Rail Events!

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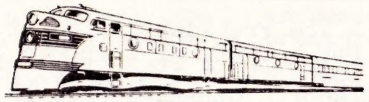

Volume 1 February 1, 1971 Number 5

WINTER RAILROADING ROUNDUP

President Nixon Wants To Dissolve DOT

The President's 2nd State of the Union message called for a Dept. of Economic Development that would take over the work of the Depts. of Transportation, Commerce, and Labor. Other aspects of transportation, in addition to housing, city development and renewal, and problems of general community life, would be handled by a Dept. of Community Development. At present the chances for these changes to be wrought appear slim.

Penn Central Finally Gets Its $100 Million

PC's $100 million in trustee certificates at last went on the market Jan. 26 and were quickly bought up. The government-guaranteed certificates are to keep PC in cash at least through March. The railroad immediately petitioned its trustees for permission to use $15 million of the proceeds to meet payrolls and taxes.

Pullman Emphasizes Rail Crisis

The railroads are facing a real financial crisis, caused largely by antiquated regulation and taxation and lack of ability to participate in government transportation programs, according to the Pullman Corporation, railroad car builders. Pullman took out a full-page ad in the Wall Street Journal Jan. 26 to put over its message. It detailed the chaos resulting from one day (last Dec. 10) without rail service, and implied that worse things could be in the offing, like PC's bankruptcy, given the falling earnings of the railroads in the past two years.

HOW TO KILL A PASSENGER TRAIN — No. 5 of a series

While on the topic of stations, we shouldn't overlook a corollary of the rule about hiding an existing facility: that is the trick of displaying a nonexistent facility. Example: you have a large downtown ticket office that is quite prominently visible. Move operations to a smaller building that is much more difficult to locate. You'll have to make a few announcements of the move in order to maintain a facade of serving the public. However, these can easily be hidden in the back pages of newspapers. The important thing is to leave the old building standing as long as possible, complete with whatever large signs it may have. Small "vacated" signs on the door will convince a potential customer that trains no longer run. Given the time lag for getting the new address in phone directories, a substantial amount of business can be turned away, easily enough to post significant drops in passenger usage that can be reported for the year in question.

Rail Travel Newsletter, published 24 times yearly, on 1st & 3rd Mondays each month by Message Media, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. Editor: James Russell. Vol.1, No.5. Feb. 1, 1971.

RAILPAX NETWORK EXPANDED

The big news of the week was Sec. Volpe's Jan.28 announcement of the final Railpax network. In response to pressure from NARP, public officials, labor unions, and individuals--Volpe received about 3000 letters in all--the original network was expanded to include Seattle-San Diego service, Los Angeles-New Orleans, Norfolk Va.-Cincinnati, St. Louis-Kansas City, and a spur line to the Florida West Coast.* The Florida line was inadvertently omitted, Volpe said. In addition he specified that Minneapolis be included in the Seattle-Chicago run, that the San Francisco-Chicago route go thru Denver, and that the Los Angeles-Chicago train run via Kansas City. The new network leaves four states--Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and South Dakota--without trains. Senator W. Prouty of Vermont, one of the sponsors of the Railpax bill, was disappointed that a Boston-Montreal route was not specified, leaving northern New England trainless. (State or other government agencies are free by law to contract with Railpax for service in areas not covered by the basic network, if they pay any resulting deficit.)

NEW YORK STATE MAY SUBSIDIZE MORE TRAINS

State Attorney General L. Lefkowitz called Jan.28 for creation of a state agency to subsidize passenger train routes not included in the basic Railpax network. Examples are New York-Albany and Montreal, and New York-Chatham. Sale of bonds would finance the agency.

RONALD REAGAN RAPS RAILPAX

California Governor Reagan drew the ire of rail travelers when his office distributed a form letter to correspondents concerned with the initial omission of north-south service on the West Coast. Wrote Reagan: "Topography and intercity distances on the West Coast mitigate against conventional railroads as a viable mode of transportation for passengers, and all the existing passenger trains in the California corridors operate at a loss." He indicated concern with the "millions of taxpayers who may be forced to subsidize a system which is basically uneconomical." He said he endorsed "truly high-speed ground transportation" which would attract enough revenue to pay for itself. Reagan has been sharply criticized in the past for supporting the influential highway and oil interests in the state, and some critics see his new remarks as further support of highway and air transport and a blow to the underdog rail travel proponents. His present position places him in opposition to all 40 of the state's elected Congressmen and Senators, with one exception, who supported West Coast rail service under Railpax.

IF WE CAN SEND A MAN TO THE MOON...

As the Apollo 14 moonshot gets underway, critics again are making comparisons between costs of space ventures and money spent to improve the earthly environment. The present shot is costing the U.S. $400 million, or ten times the $40 million the government is investing to establish the National Rail Passenger Corporation to provide terrestrial rail travel for over 200 million Americans.

*Chicago-Washington was also included.

WINTER TRAVEL -- A SPECIAL NEWS ROUNDUP

Spring is arriving in coastal California as these lines are written--plums and magnolias bloom on Berkeley streets and early daffodils nod outside the window. But elsewhere Winter rages on and will continue awhile. The past 5 or 6 weeks have seen a succession of fierce storms in most sections of the nation and in Europe that have put man's efforts to keep moving about to a severe test. Rail, air, and highway facilities were all highly strained by Old Man Winter. How did these modes of transport fare?

The first major storm in the East began slowly on New Year's Eve and by the time it had moved off into the Atlantic had dumped 2 feet of snow in a wide swath from North Carolina to Vermont. Because of the holiday, many stayed at home and eased transportation problems. Some areas such as Washington D.C. had their heaviest snow in nearly four years. Airports closed down, highways were hazardous, and President Nixon's helicopter flight to Camp David on New Year's was delayed. The 80 trains operating out of Union Station, Washington, had few delays, while frozen switches in Pennsylvania and New Jersey caused more delays. Buses arriving from the West were running 70-80 minutes late.

That storm was mild compared to the frigid blast that hit the Rockies and the Midwest beginning Jan.3 and lasting through most of the week. Highway traffic was completely snarled in several states. On Interstate 80 near Omaha more than 1000 motorists were stranded and forced to seek shelter in motels and farms. Traffic deaths due to the storm began to mount, and airports throughout the Midwest closed down. Thousands of air travelers were diverted to other cities. Omaha was swamped with 5000 abandoned cars in its snow-filled streets. Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas were hit the worst at the height of the storm January 4. Winds of 50 mph followed heavy snow and subzero temperatures. The Burlington Northern reported 25-foot snow drifts in Nebraska. Traffic deaths in the storm resulted not only from crashes on slick roads but also from heart attacks due to pushing or digging out stalled vehicles, and carbon monoxide poisoning from running engines with closed windows.

The storm resulted in one of the most publicized travel incidents of the month. The Union Pacific's combined "Cities" train left Chicago as usual Sunday night Jan. 3, operated by the Milwaukee Road between there and Omaha. 209 persons were aboard as the trip began. Near Perry, Iowa the train hit a snowdrift which uncoupled several cars and broke heat and water connections. Church members in Perry offered passengers a hot dinner while snowplows worked. The rest of the trip was made with most cars unheated and passengers crowding together into two cars for warmth in the subzero weather. The train reached Ogden 2 days late (Jan.6) where cars destined for San Francisco had missed their S.P. connection, now only triweekly, and shivering travelers were bused on to Calif.

Such events make news, since trains seem to have an inherent drama about them. There was comparatively less comment about the fact that every road in Iowa was closed by snow, and almost nothing was moving January 4.

Meanwhile on the Burlington Northern, East-West trains were running through Minneapolis one-half to one hour late. 1500 air passengers were diverted to the Twin Cities and BN claimed they were not taking to trains as an alternative to their cancelled flights.

The next day, Jan. 5, the BN North Coast Limited, westbound from Chicago with 178 passengers, derailed near McKenzie N.D., injuring 7 persons, none seriously. Eleven cars left the track, one coach going on its side. Injured persons were taken to Bismarck, and the rest were bused on from Bismarck to their destinations. It is not known if the derailment was caused by the storm conditions.

For Iowa it was the worst snow in nearly 30 years. The storm had cut a 1000-mile path through the Plains and Midwest states, stranding thousands at airports and paralyzing highway traffic. But Winter's storming was not over. By Jan. 14 another freezing storm moved eastward thru Washington and the Northern states towards the Atlantic Coast. Snow was again setting records and travel warnings were being issued. Ice and sleet wreaked havoc with highway traffic. In Washington D.C. hundreds of traffic accidents occurred. In Chicago an 18-car crash on Lake Shore Drive and a 20-car pileup on Dan Ryan Expressway resulted from hazardous driving conditions. No major train incidents were reported in that storm.

Meanwhile in the West heavy rains were falling in Northern California and farther north. The rains stopped by Jan. 17 but may have weakened Southern Pacific tracks near Redding, over which the southbound Cascade was traveling at 45 mph at 6:00 AM. The 138 passengers were mostly sleeping as the 2-engined, 10-car train hit the weak track and derailed. The lead engine stayed on the tracks and no cars overturned. Several passengers were bruised, but none required treatment. Buses arrived 5 hours later to carry them on their way. Heat remained on in two cars, but the outside temperature was a relatively mild 40 degrees.

A different travel hazard--fog--was blamed for 6 highway deaths Jan. 27 north of Bakersfield, Calif. Ground fog filled the San Joaquin Valley in the early morning and created zero visibility. Despite conditions, cars and trucks barrelled along at the normal speed limit. What resulted was a massive pileup of vehicles on U.S. 99, the S.F.-L.A. highway, and at least 21 persons injured and 6 dead. Seventy vehicles were involved in collisions. Next day Highway Patrol cars with flashing lights convoyed drivers through the continuing dense fog.

And thus it went. Lots of trips were interrupted or cancelled. Lots of people died, none of them on trains. Lots of weaknesses in our transportation system were highlighted.

COMMUTING AND RAPID TRANSIT

Streetcar Accident Injures 25 in San Francisco Oil spilled on streetcar tracks was tentatively blamed for a collision of 3 streetcars at 5:50 PM Jan. 14 on Market St. when two cars failed to stop behind a third. The rear of the middle car was pushed in 4 feet. Broken limbs were the most serious injuries.

Long Island Train Derails, Injuring 40 Riders The FBI was investigating probable sabotage involved in the derailment of an eastbound train at Brentwood N.Y. Jan. 24. The train was carrying 100 commuters when it went through an open switch at 5:40 PM. The diesel engine derailed and fell over, pulling 3 cars off the tracks. Some of the injured were trapped almost 5 hours in the wreckage.

EDITORIALS: RAILPAX—FIRST VICTORY FOR RAIL TRAVELERS

Volpe's announcement that he had expanded the initial Railpax network is a victory not only for present train users but also for the segment of the population who will never actually ride the trains, for it is a step in the right direction of providing a balanced transportation system for the whole nation. And while it is a small victory, it is an important instance of public officials responding to public demand. The demand came from a public who worked within the "system" to achieve its needs. It was a seemingly rare example of bureaucratic machinery and public pressure functioning together in a smooth and constructive way.

More battles will have to be waged, however, before a meaningful transportation system is achieved. We cannot expect the rails to take much of the load off overcrowded roads and airways with just the 165 trains planned for the presently designated network. Rail travelers will find it necessary to maintain pressure for needed local, intrastate and regional runs not now in the network.

THE MYTH OF MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

Certain Western railroad officials who would like to eliminate all passenger trains have introduced the notion that mountainous terrain such as that found in the Sierras & Tehachapis of California make rail travel impractical. This false idea has been echoed by the DOT and now by California Governor Reagan as well. These officials have apparently not done their homework and have perhaps never ridden the routes they criticize, but have simply accepted the railroads' allegations. In terms of speed, airplanes can negotiate mountainous or any other terrain the best. But the real competitor of the rails is the auto, and there the argument falls apart. Examples: train travel time between San Francisco and Los Angeles is faster than most highway travel and definitely more comfortable and safer, even with present technology. A train trip from San Francisco to Portland, negotiating many mountain curves, is an easy and pleasant overnight jaunt. When highways must traverse terrain subject to adverse weather conditions, they become extremely hazardous and are frequently closed completely. But trains keep rolling along, fast, safe, comfortable, clearly the most effective form of transportation.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"It lays the foundation for what in my opinion is destined to become the all-time comeback in the history of American transportation."

--Sec. Volpe announcing expanded Railpax system

"We believe that ultimately the government should acquire the tracks, roadbeds, signal systems, and other fixed facilities and make the private carriers pay user charges to the government. ...This really isn't asking too much. It would put railroads on the same basis with the federal government as highways and airports."

--Anthony Haswell, head of NARP, interviewed by David Butwin in Saturday Review, Jan. 23

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR CHARTER SUBSCRIBERS

Many charter subscribers have wanted a one-year term for their initial subscription, to avoid the nuisance of renewing after only 6 months and to insure uninterrupted receipt of the latest news and comment about rail travel. Therefore, we are making this one-time offer that cannot be repeated: every charter subscriber may extend his subscription to a full year for only one dollar more (actually 12½ months, since all charter subscribers receive 13 issues for their first dollar), AND STILL KEEP THEIR PRIVILEGE OF RENEWING AT THE END OF THAT TIME AT A SPECIAL REDUCED RATE.

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